Networking: Hollywood comes to home movies

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Just a few years ago, Brian Olson recalls, he would head back to the office and spend weekends at the studio of the company where he works to assemble a polished home video that "friends and relatives actually wanted to see."

Today, Olson, who works for a software company near Denver, has networked his home computer and his digital camera, and he can edit and mix movies from the privacy of his study.

"I do even better productions right at home," he said. "I use Roxio's Videowave Movie Creator 7.5 software on a Dell 8300 computer. I load the video shot on a Sony digital video camera through the USB cable and once it's on the computer, there isn't much I can't do," said Olson.

Other consumers are enjoying the same networking technology trend, experts told UPI's Networking.

"The big trend in digital video packages on the market today is integration," said Milan Petrovich, academic director for digital media production at The Art Institute of Las Vegas, a leading arts school. "Packages now contain software for editing, soundtrack creation, motion graphics and DVD authoring, all seamlessly integrated."

Basic editing tools are often built into today's video cameras, but there are off-the-shelf software editing tools for your PC that can turn your living room, or spare bedroom, into a production studio.

"There are packages that include sound effects from Sony's theatrical sound editing department," said Brent Marcus, a spokesman for Sony Media Software in Los Angeles. "These are collections of sounds that can be plugged right into any music creation software to create professional-quality music."

The music styles suit a variety of tastes, from jazz to hip-hop to rock.

The editing packages are priced for different budgets and range from $49.99 to hundreds or even thousands of dollars. There are video packages that include audio editing capability, as well as straight audio editing tools.

"The video software packages range from the professional and prosumer 'Vegas' product to the consumer-level Vegas Movie Studio line, which comes with advanced soundtrack editing tools," Marcus said. "Audio editing includes Sound Forge for professionals and prosumers (expert consumers)."

Specific soundtrack creation software also is available, and though most consumers lack the skills of a Danny Elfman, the former Oingo Boingo singer turned Hollywood soundtrack producer, their output may well be comparable using that technology.

"Each of these products works on a loop-based system," said Marcus. "There's ACID for pros and prosumers. ACID Music Studio for consumers. ACID XMC for teens. There are also kids' products -- Jam Trax and Super Dooper Music Looper."

There even is an online mixing community, called ACIDplanet.com, where aspiring producers share their creations.

Sony has taken the technology directly to consumers, working with the

Boys & Girls Clubs of America, teaching the youngsters there the "basics of music making," said Angela Richmond, assistant director of the Boys & Girls Clubs of America, in Atlanta. "This music can be easily added to any video they've created."

There are products that help consumers produce a soundtrack, even for movies that are more like scrapbooks of pictures. A leading maker of digital picture scrapbooks, Lasting Impressions, recently debuted a product called MemoryMixer.

"This is the industry's first truly digital scrapbooking product," said Alex Koriza, a spokesman for the company, which is located Salt Lake City. The product allows consumers to "combine digital video, digital sound, digital photos, computer graphics, typewritten text, using their own fonts and narration capabilities. This creates a multi-media experience that brings memories to life."

There are those who have smaller budgets, however. Camera makers know this and have integrated some excellent audio capabilities into today's digital video cameras.

"A major area of concern for camcorder users has always been the recording of narration tracks on home movies," said Daniel Yoo, a spokesman for Dolby Laboratories, the sound technology company.

Yoo noted that Dolby has worked with camcorder makers to ensure that recording in the latest home cameras occurs in Dolby 5.1 surround sound.

"We've taken the technologies originally developed for movie theaters and licensed them to consumer electronics manufacturers, so consumers can recreate the cinematic surround sound experience in the home," Yoo said.

Earlier this year, Dolby announced the first implementation of Dolby Digital 5.1 Creator for a consumer camcorder.

"The Sony DVD Handycam camcorder, model DCR-DVD403 incorporates built-in, multi-channel microphones and Dolby Digital 5.1 Creator," Yoo said. "This enables consumers to record their home movies in dramatic 5.1 channel digital surround sound."

Interestingly, a commercial market is developing for these home-produced video tracks. A company called thoughtequity.com is enabling consumers to download their home videos to their site, which is searchable by professional video and film experts. If they use the footage, the consumer gets a royalty.

"People go on vacations and capture the beauty of the location, and that footage is worth a lot to film producers, video production people, etc.," said Lauri Harrison, a spokeswoman for thoughtequity.com. "Consumers can monetize their footage. They receive a check every time someone downloads the video. So now everyone can become a film director -- and earn money in the process."

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